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Contact: Robin Winchell (202) 225-4031

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** - U.S. Rep. Charlie Melancon spoke on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives today in support of an amendment that would expand offshore drilling for natural gas. The amendment, which was to the Interior-Environment FY08 Appropriations bill being considered in the House, would change the ban to allow drilling for natural gas beyond 25 miles from the coastline. A digital recording of Rep. Melancon's speech can be provided via email upon request.

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Rep. Melancon emphasized the need for lower gas prices, saying to his colleagues in the House, **"As we move forward in this country and talk about energy independence, and when you pull up to that gas pump and you see that \$3 figure up there, just remember those folks back home that are on fixed incomes, on Social Security, that are worried about how they will pay the utility bill, much less how they can fill the gas tank, and whether they can buy the loaf of bread and milk or whether they need to have the gas in their car to get to the doctor."**

Rep. Melancon also addressed environmental concerns some of his colleagues have about offshore drilling, and the effect offshore drilling could have on tourism, commenting, **"We talk about [the negative effects of offshore drilling on] tourism and fishing, but the tourism in Louisiana is better than it has ever been. Particularly now that the industries have better technology, the fishing is phenomenal. 30% of the fish, of seafood consumed in this country come from the waters off of Louisiana's coast, and we have been drilling for over 50 years, deep water, shallow water, coastal waters, inland waters, land based, you**

**name it. I implore everyone to think about this. I respect tremendously my colleagues that have the fear of environmental concerns. That is something that I share with you, but I have seen these oil companies. I have seen them in the past when they were awful. I have seen them today when they do an excellent job. The technology gets better by the day."**

A full transcript of Rep. Melancon's comments on the floor is below.

Last week, Rep. Melancon joined several of his colleagues in the House in introducing legislation that would remove the ban on drilling for natural gas in the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS). The National Environment and Energy Development Act (NEED) Act would provide billions in additional royalties to Louisiana for coastal restoration projects.

In supporting the NEED Act, Rep. Melancon said, "Louisiana loses a football field-sized piece of land to the sea every 35 minutes. During Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, we lost over 200 square miles of coastline. Our state is literally washing away into the Gulf of Mexico. Royalties from drilling on the outer continental shelf are essential for restoring and rebuilding our barrier islands and coastal wetlands that weaken deadly storm surges and protect our people and communities"

A transcript of Rep. Melancon's remarks today follows.

*Mr. Chairman,*

*I have heard a lot of facts that have gone on both sides, for and against. I'm from a state that's been producing oil and gas off its coast in its coastal waters, on land, and every place else that's possible, for well over 50 years. I think Pennsylvania may have been the only state that produced before Louisiana started.*

*If you go back those 50 years, there's a lot that we could say environmentally that should have been done back there that would have protected America's wetlands, the estuaries and marshes of south Louisiana. That being said, now looking at today's technology, offshore*

*drilling for oil or for gas is one of the cleanest that you'll ever find. Yes, there are muds, there are liquids. But there are also liquids that are made from sugar. It's biodegradable. It is something that can and is being used out there.*

*The thing that scares me the most is we talk about energy independence, and...we [created] in an energy bill a 125-mile barrier from Florida in the Gulf of Mexico, if I recall, in the energy bill this past year. While if you go 45 miles off of Key West where those important fragile areas -- down in that area we've got China and Cuba in control of the oil and gas production. And what scares me even more, if you look at some of the latest news, Russia is basically becoming dominant in the world for energy production, as are the countries in the Middle East.*

*If you look at their offshore drilling, I don't hear about all the oil spills. As a matter of a fact, I went through Katrina. I went through Rita, and I heard the numbers. I respect where the Member got the numbers because it came from somebody who provided it. But the only real oil spills I know of were in Chalmette, Louisiana, at the Murphy oil refinery and Phillips petroleum which are on land in Plaquemines and St. Bernard. Yes, there were some small oil leaks, but there was probably more diesel fuel out of the tanks of some of those rigs that collapsed. But far less than what came out of the gas tanks in the ground and St. Bernard, and Orleans parishes, and probably over on the Gulf Coast, far more fuel leaked into the waters that flooded those cities.*

*As we move forward in this country and talk about energy independence, and when you pull up to that gas pump and you see that \$3 figure up there, just remember those folks back home that are on fixed incomes, on Social Security, that are worried about how they will pay the utility bill, much less how they can fill the gas tank, and whether they can buy the loaf of bread and milk or whether they need to have the gas in their car to get to the doctor.*

*We talk about [the negative effects of offshore drilling on] tourism and fishing, but the tourism in Louisiana is better than it has ever been. Particularly now that the industries have better technology, the fishing is phenomenal. 30% of the fish, of seafood consumed in this country come from the waters off of Louisiana's coast, and we have been drilling for over 50 years, deep water, shallow water, coastal waters, inland waters, land based, you name it. I implore everyone to think about this. I respect tremendously my colleagues that have the fear of environmental concerns. That is something that I share with you, but I have seen these oil companies. I have seen them in the past when they were awful. I have seen them today when they do an excellent job. The technology gets better by the day.*

*The oil spills, the last oil spills that were of any consequences were done by ships hauling oil in from the Middle East, Venezuela, and other locations. It wasn't by oil rigs offshore.*

*We're talking about natural gas. You can perforate a drilling pipe at any point in time, or elevation or depth that you want. You can drill through oil, you can drill through rock, you can drill through whatever it is below there and sample what is there before you open it up, and if it is not natural gas, then you keep drilling until you get to the sand that you're looking for. Perforate and, yes, bring only natural gas in.*

*Mr. Chairman, I thank you for the opportunity. I implore, if we're going to make this country energy independent, we have to find the means and gas, and this amendment helps us.*

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